

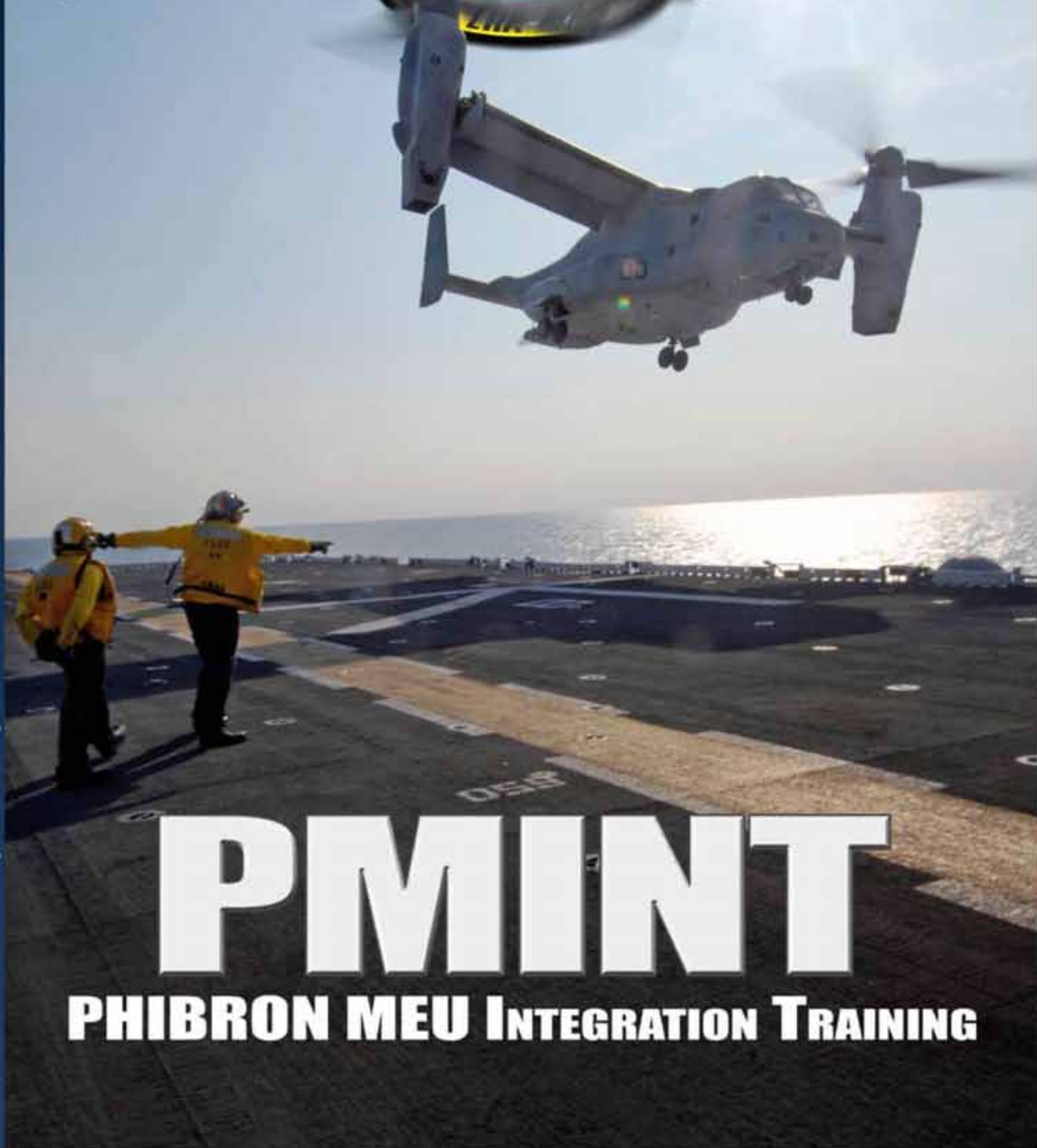
September 2009

www.nassau.navy.mil

Gator Times



USS NASSAU (LHA 4) — THE NAVY'S "TOP GATOR"



PMINT

PHIBRON MEU INTEGRATION TRAINING

Gator Times



30 years
LHA 4

Contents

GatorTimes

Commanding Officer
Capt. Ronald Reis

Executive Officer
Cmdr. David A. Stracener

Command Master Chief
CMDCM(AW/SW) Stan Kopiczak

Administration Officer
Lt. Cmdr. William Parks

Visual Information Division Officer
Ensign Apphia Maxima

Public Affairs Officer
MCC(SW/AW) Chris Hoffpauir

Editor / Design & Layout
MC2(SW) Michael Cortez

Staff

MCC(SW) Mary Popejoy
MC1 James Stillepe
MC2(SW) Shane Arrington
MC2(SW) Amanda Clayton
MC3 Jonathan Pankau
MCSN Chris Williamson

FEATURES

3 Nassau Supports PHIBRON/ MEU Operations

4 II MEF showcases warfare capabilities for QDR panel

5-6 24 MEU

7 Nassau, 24 MEU Sailors and Marines combine efforts on Mess Deck

8 AIMD stands out as an elite team during major inspection

9 Nassau Sailors discover Jiu Jitsu

DEPARTMENTS

2 Captain's Call
CMC Corner

11 Command Achievements



On the Cover:

A MV-22 Osprey takes off from Nassau's flight deck during morning flight operations.

Photo by MC3 Jonathan Pankau



Gator Times is a product of the USS Nassau (LHA 4) Public Affairs Office. The editorial content of this newsletter does not necessarily reflect the official views of the command or any government agency and does not imply endorsement.

Greetings shipmates and thank you for reading the September edition of the Gator Times Captain's Call.

I must say it is exciting to be the captain of a fully certified warship. The challenging gauntlet of training we recently completed is a testament to the Top Gator crew's dedication and professionalism. Nominally a ship gets 16 weeks to complete what we did in 10 weeks. Though Nassau is fully certified, we have a few more events in front of us before deployment.

The bulk of the certification process culminated with ULTRA C and PMINT. Now we have two major exercises remaining: COMPTUEX and CERTEX. The Composite Training Unit Exercise fully integrates Nassau Amphibious Readiness Group (ARG) to conduct single and multi-ship training. We will work hand-in-hand with USS Ashland (LSD 48) and USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19) to train for operations the ARG will complete on deployment. The Certification Exercise will hone our skills with 24 MEU.

October will be a busy month for Nassau's hard working Weapons Department. Nassau is stopping in Naval Weapons Station Earle, N.J., for an ammo on-load. Remember to give our Gunner's Mates and Aviation Ordnancemen a wide berth while operating with the ammo. Weapons Department will be working long hours to accomplish this task. Please show your support whenever you have the chance.

Captain's Call

Capt. Ronald Reis
Commanding Officer
USS Nassau (LHA 4)



In closing, Nassau has a full schedule ahead and deployment is just around the corner. As always "daily sustained excellence" is our goal. This takes hard work and forethought. Until next time, remember to motivate yourself and those around you.

CMC Corner

CMDCM (AW/SW) Stan Kopiczak



Nassau Family and Friends,

September is my favorite month because that's when we bring our new Chief Petty Officers into the Chiefs' Mess. After completing a challenging six week induction process, these newly-minted Chiefs bring new ideas and much talent to our Mess. I'm proud of their accomplishments and they should be as well.

They're not just stepping into a role of middle management and higher responsibility. They're upholding a proud tradition and embarking on a totally new phase of their careers and lives.

My challenge to them is to continue learning how to lead, take on more and greater responsibility, and not be afraid to step outside their comfort zone.

As we continue to prepare for next year's deployment, I en-

courage you to take advantage of a couple of Pre-Deployment briefs in November. They'll be held at Nov. 19 and 24 at 6:30 p.m. at BLDG U-40 on Naval Station Norfolk.

Speakers will include representatives from the Fleet Family Support Center and the American Red Cross. Nassau Command Chaplain Cmdr. William Stallard, Nassau Legal Officer Legalman 1st Class (SW) George Amerson and other command representatives will also be there to offer advice.

Finally, one of the best resources for the Nassau Family is the Nassau Family Readiness Group. I encourage each and every family member to check out what this outstanding group has to offer. For more information please contact the NFRG president at nfrgpresident@yahoo.com

Until next issue, thanks and God bless.

Nassau Supports PHIBRON/MEU Operations

By MC3 Jonathan Pankau
USS Nassau Public Affairs

USS Nassau (LHA 4) joined forces with Amphibious Squadron 8 (PHIBRON 8), 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (24 MEU), and Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 28 "Dragon-whales" (HSC-28) for PHIBRON MEU Integration Training (PMINT) started Aug. 27, with operations lasting through the first week of September.

"The purpose of PMINT is to practice as a team conducting combat, humanitarian assistance, non-combatant evacuation, and other operations involving the PHIBRON and MEU working together," said Maj. Larry Bailey, operations officer for the Marine Medium Tilt-Rotor Squadron 162 (Reinforced) Golden Eagles (VMM-162).

According to Gunnery Sgt. William Ward, Nassau's Combat Cargo Assistant, the ship's well deck sees a constant flow of traffic to and from the beach as Landing Craft Utilities, Landing Craft Air Cushions, and Amphibious Assault Vehicles bring Marines and cargo aboard.

"We're bringing aboard Humvees and cargo containers to store on Nassau in preparation for the upcoming deployment," said Ward. "Battalion Landing Team 1/9 is also doing beach landing training during the PMINT."

Staff Sgt. Stephyn Eaton, attached to 24 MEU's Battalion Landing Team 1/9, added that Nassau's Supporting Arms Coordination Center (SACC) is coordinating with the Battalion Landing Team 1/9 for the Fire Support Coordination Exercise starting Sep. 1. Marines deploy from Nassau and practice firing 81mm mortars and M777 155mm Howitzers at Camp Lejeune for beach landing exercises.

"We're here to get the Top Gator Navy ready to fight!" said Eaton.

An equally important facet of integration is how well the Marines settle into life aboard Nassau. Living in such tight quarters is difficult enough without learning how to navigate a naval vessel. Ward said the Navy way of life is also an issue for the new guests.

"The Navy runs everything on a tight daily schedule that is hard to get used to," said Ward. "Once they get into the swing of things, most Marines I talk to enjoy the new experience."

Nassau's Air Department dealt with the pressures of handling a busy flight deck. Aviation Boatswain's Mate Handler 3rd Class (AW) Paul Bria, a member of Nassau's Crash and Salvage team helped train other airmen how to deal with a full Marine Aviation Combat Element.

"The PMINT is an outstanding training environment for airmen to experience what dealing with marines and their large amount of aircraft will be like on deployment," said Bria. "They know crunch time is right around the corner and everyone on all sides of the house is doing an excellent job under pressure."



Landing Craft Air Cushion (LCAC)-15 from Little Creek approaches USS Nassau (LHA 4) off the coast of Virginia.
Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson

Bria said long flight operations lasting into the night are a normal occurrence for Air Department's hard working personnel. They train alongside Boatswain's Mates and engineers to keep the ship combat ready.

"It's hard dealing with a bunch of new guys coming on your ship, creating more work," said Bria. "Having a mission is the important part, though, and I welcome the Marines as part of the team fighting that mission."

"I thought I was going to hate living on a ship for so long, but it's very peaceful living out on the ocean," said Lance Cpl. Anthony Cilluffo. "I like to go out on the flight deck when I'm not busy and look out at the ocean after work. I concentrate on working out or grappling in the hangar bay."

Each side of the team is getting ready for deployment and learning to live with their new shipmates. Bailey said he can feel the excitement rising as training and operations gear up for the big underway in January.

"This is why I joined the Marine Corps," said Bailey. "This is why we all joined the military. Nassau has been very accommodating and I'm enjoying every minute of it."

II MEF showcases its irregular warfare capabilities for QDR panel

By Lance Cpl. James W. Clark
II MEF Public Affairs

Representatives from the Department of Defense visited Marine Corps forces in North Carolina, Aug. 28, 2009, as part of the Quadrennial Defense Review.

According to its Web site, the QDR is a detailed report compiled by the DOD every four years on threats and challenges the United States faces and how to 're-balance DOD strategies, capabilities and forces to address today's conflicts and tomorrow's threats.'

The QDR panel's visit to North Carolina, hosted by Lt. Gen. Dennis J. Hejlik, commanding general, II Marine Expeditionary Force, was designed to showcase the Corps' focus on irregular warfare and amphibious capabilities. Among the 13 QDR panel members were civilian and military experts in a wide range of fields to include plans and policy, strategy, terrorism, information warfare, intelligence, and low-intensity warfare.

With the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan presenting new and unique challenges to established doctrine and training, the Marine Corps has undertaken a series of warfighting initiatives to evolve the force to meet the current manner of engaging the enemy. The QDR panel members were given a snapshot of these initiatives directed toward irregular warfare and how they are being implemented in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, Djibouti, and elsewhere in the world.

A key component is cultural and language training that prepares forward-deployed Marines and sailors to communicate with tribal and village leaders. By forming ties with the local populace, the Marines can weaken the strength of terrorist and insurgent groups operating within those populations.

"There's not a unit that goes out that isn't accompanied by a local or doesn't have someone who speaks the language and understands the culture," said Hejlik. "In Afghanistan, you have corporals and small unit leaders who speak some measure of Pashto or Dari."

Hejlik went on to explain that while the battlefields may have changed, irregular warfare is nothing new to the Marine Corps. "Irregular warfare has been a central part of our Corps' history," he said, "and as such, has been a part of our professional education since the Small Wars Manual was published in 1940." This legacy was in evidence at Camp Lejeune's military operations in urban terrain facility where the panel members witnessed Marines from 1st Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, interacting with Afghan role players as they patrolled the area and held meetings with village elders.

Hejlik addressed the fact that in the past, certain units received extensive cultural and language capabilities, but it is now essential for success in Afghanistan and elsewhere that all deployed units have that capability.

"Marines understand down to the lowest level that we must have the ability to engage the enemy without ever having to launch a direct attack," said Maj. Jeremy Dempsey, the officer-in-charge of the Amphibious Raid Branch for II MEF's Special Operations Training Group. "The key is to determine the difference between reconcilable and irreconcilable – to find those individuals who can be swayed to our position and to meet their needs."

A host of cultural and language barriers have challenged Marines in the past which have prompted them to adapt and evolve. In Iraq, Marines employed female Iraqis to search other female citizens at security checkpoints in order to avoid crossing cultural boundaries, Dempsey explained.

Hejlik pointed out that another key aspect in the Corps' success has been the constant refinement of its selection and training processes that groom leaders at all levels who are capable of making decisions independently and in a timely manner in complex and lethal environments.

While Marines in combat town conducted talks with key leaders during the training exercise, a Navy corpsman provided simulated first aid to one of the actors. Both situations required Marines and sailors to apply their understanding of Afghan customs and be capable of speaking some measure of the language. By instituting cultural training across all elements of the Marine Corps, it ensures that progress made in Afghanistan and other theaters will not be undermined due to a limited understanding of customs and social etiquette, Dempsey explained.

continued on page 10



Lt. Gen. Dennis J. Hejlik, commanding general, II Marine Expeditionary Force, greets Maj. Gen. Robert E. Schmidle Jr., Assistant Deputy Commandant for Programs and Resources (Programs), at the airstrip aboard Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C., Aug. 28, 2009, as he arrives with panel members from a Quadrennial Defense Review panel. The QDR panel's visit to II MEF was to provide its members with an overview of Marine Corps amphibious capabilities and irregular warfare training.
Photo by Lance Cpl. James W. Clark



24th MEU

Nassau, 24 MEU Sailors & Marines combine efforts on Mess Decks

By MCSN Chris Williamson
USS Nassau Public Affairs

Sailors and Marines aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4) combined efforts as the Nassau Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) began its initial integration phase off the North Carolina coast Aug. 27 to Sept. 4.

The phase involves the embarkation of Commander, Amphibious Squadron Eight's entire staff and the command, air and ground elements of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (24 MEU) aboard Nassau. The Nassau ARG also includes USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19) and USS Ashland (LSD 48).

One area where integration and cooperation was readily apparent was on the Mess Decks, where Navy Culinary Specialists, Marine cooks and Navy and Marine food service attendants (FSA) labored to feed nearly 3,000 hungry personnel.

"The first day underway is kind of a trial and error because the Marines have to learn their way around the ship and it takes lots of training and management," said Culinary Specialist Second Class (SW) Todd Heydel. "But now that we've gotten past the learning process, things are easier."

"I enjoy having the Marines here," he added. "They always show a lot of hard work, motivation, and teamwork."

The crew members and embarked Marines didn't disappoint their shipmates. Crowds, noise and long chow lines were the

norm, keeping the cooks and FSAs busy. However, such scenes are considered standard when Marines are aboard and Sailors and Marines who work in food service are always motivated to do the job right.

FSAs are junior Sailors and Marines assigned on a temporary basis to assist the Culinary Specialists and cooks. Though they are trained for other jobs, every Sailor and Marine will likely serve three to six months working in food service early in their careers.

One Marine FSA is Cpl. Brian Kamman, one of 24 MEU's weather forecasters.

"Helping the Sailors with their workload takes a while to adjust to," Kamman said. "I appreciate the work they do because while we only have to do it for a few days, they do it for months."

Each FSA and cook receives training on cleaning, sanitation, and food preparation while underway. Sailors and Marines bring their unique skills and techniques to the kitchen, allowing the Mess Decks to operate smoothly.

"It really depends on who's having a good day and who's having a bad day," said Kamman. "I'd have to say that we exercise good teamwork."



Marine Corporal Brian Kamman, an FSA aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4), stacks clean plates that came out of the scullery machine in the wardroom. Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson

AIMD stands out during major inspection

By MC2(SW) Michael Cortez
USS Nassau Public Affairs

The Aviation Intermediate Maintenance Detachment aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4) recently passed an Aviation Maintenance Inspection above fleet standards.

Starting Aug. 18th, AIMD went through a rigorous four day, department-wide inspection. The inspection took a close look at all the programs AIMD manages, such as welding, oil sampling and radar trouble-shooting.

Aviation Electronics Technician Chief (AW/SW) Frank Untalan said one of the major questions brought up during the process is how well are these programs actually utilized. With more than 3,000 calibrated items supported throughout the ship, it's important to make sure they all play their specific role in maintaining aircraft. Even when the flight deck is bare, AIMD must keep a constant close eye on all their maintenance practices.

"I believe [AIMD is] the heartbeat behind what makes this a ready and capable ship," said Untalan.

According to Untalan, the Aviation Maintenance Management Team, from North Island San Diego, came aboard Nassau for what was scheduled to be an assist visit. They wanted to show the ship's AIMD department what to expect in the near future when it came time for the real inspection.

Untalan said the inspection team was impressed to see how

well Nassau implements these important maintenance practices, how knowledgeable the AIMD team was, and that it was clearly obvious that the department was ready. Without further delay, Lt. Cmdr. Arsenio Francisco, leader of the inspection team, decided to turn the assist visit into an actual inspection.

"I've been assigned to five different AIMD departments throughout my Navy career," said Untalan. "Never have I seen a case like this when the department made such an impression on the inspection team. For them to go ahead and turn their assist visit into the real thing speaks volumes about our department's professionalism."

AIMD Department Head Lt. Cmdr. Jose Montes mentioned, "I am extremely proud of everyone in my AIMD team. Every Sailor demonstrated their knowledge and expertise with confidence, pride and professionalism. The AMI results are the fruit of hard work and long-term commitment to aviation maintenance program excellence and not overnight preparations. I felt very confident going into the inspection because safety, high levels of readiness, and professionalism are an integral part of our daily routine and the processes we utilize in our jobs. I am fortunate to have the opportunity to be a part of the Top Gator's Aviation Maintenance Team."



AS3 Francisco Deluna refers to the Aviation Hydraulics Manual while testing the hydraulic fluid from the Hydraulic Servicing Unit in the Support Equipment shop. Photo by MC2(SW) Amanda Clayton

Nassau Sailors discover Jiu Jitsu

By MC2(SW) Amanda Clayton
USS Nassau Public Affairs

Many Sailors and Marines aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4) have found a new past time.

Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) is a martial art that focuses on grappling and ground fighting, a technique often used in Ultimate Fighting Championship competitions. BJJ promotes principles that a small person can triumph over a larger, stronger enemy by applying proper technique and leverage.

The sport has grown popular among Nassau's crew and is good to relieve stress.

"I wrestled pretty much all my life," said Machinist's Mate 2nd Class (SW) Constantious Stavroulakis. "I've done Jiu Jitsu and Judo. It's a good stress reliever after a hard days work. I also get the chance to talk to people and exchange techniques and learn from each other."

Marine Sgt. Jim Holland said he could not agree more.

"When I get on the mat, I don't look at my opponent and what branch of the military they're in, we're all the same. Grappling is a great way to relieve stress; you just leave it all on the mat."

Nassau ensures safety and cleanliness are top priorities whenever the crew comes together for grappling.

"I'm down here supervising the crew to make sure no one

gets hurt. I also have some rules that they follow when they start" said Master Chief Machinist's Mate (SW/AW) John Engelbert. "One of the rules I have is they must start knee to knee and they can't do ankle locks and knee bars. I want the guys to have fun but I don't want anyone to get hurt. We also make sure to sterilize the mats before they begin."

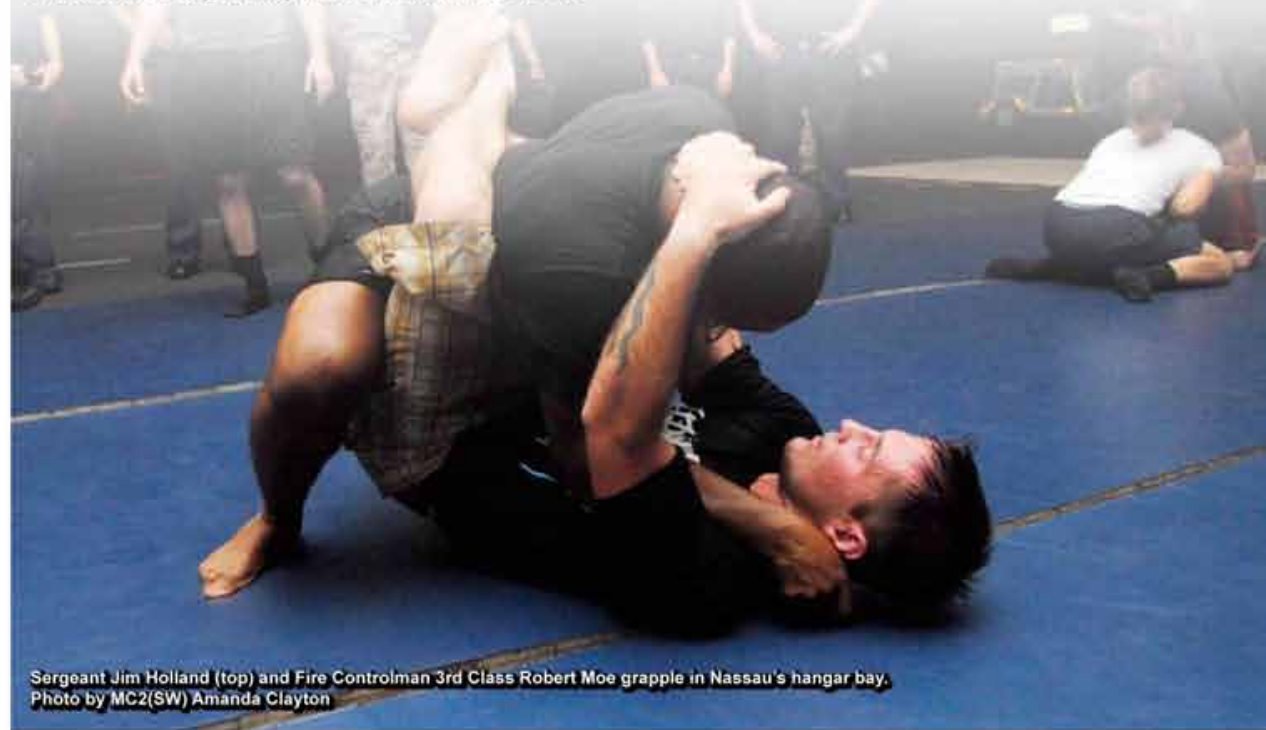
"Jiu Jitsu is a rigorous sport that promotes physical fitness," said Engelbert.

"Jiu Jitsu is a good cardiovascular workout. It involves joint manipulation and discipline. I enrolled my son into it about 10 years ago and it's just a good bonding sport," said Engelbert.

Fire Controlman 3rd Class Robert Moe, a student at Linxx Academy in Virginia Beach said he wants to start a Jiu Jitsu class onboard.

"I got into Jiu Jitsu because I wanted to stay in shape and release some aggression. I would like to start up a class on deployment for anyone who wants to learn some techniques," said Moe.

"Not only is Jiu Jitsu a good way to stay fit and relieve stress, it's also a way for Sailors and Marines to build camaraderie through friendly competition," said Holland.



Sergeant Jim Holland (top) and Fire Controlman 3rd Class Robert Moe grapple in Nassau's hangar bay.
Photo by MC2(SW) Amanda Clayton

QDR,
continued from page 4

Tanya Woodcock, an education program specialist who heads up the language program for U.S. Marine Corps Forces - Special Operations Command, gave the QDR panel a tour of the facility where Marines undergo immersive language training. The courses train Marines and sailors in languages which in turn provides units with specialists in translation who are versed in a variety of different languages, Woodcock explained.

The tour of Camp Lejeune also highlighted the Marine Corps' ability to conduct operations across the full spectrum of modern warfare – from full-scale conventional combat to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to irregular warfare. To illustrate this capability, the panel boarded MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft and were flown out to the amphibious assault ship USS Nassau off the coast of North Carolina, where it was participating in exercises with its embarked landing force, the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

During a tour of the ship and at lunch in the ship's mess decks, the panel members spoke with a number of Marines and sailors, many of whom had served overseas in a variety of operations. The Marines talked about improvements in equipment such as optics and body armor, as well as shifts in mission goals and execution. A recurring theme during lunch was the change from engaging directly with terrorist groups to building ties with locals and striking back diplomatically rather than physically. The tour on ship gave the panel members a snapshot of a MEU, which is the primary means by which the United States is able to project power in remote corners of the world. The ability to push and retrieve forces from hostile shores was evidenced by the air and landing craft operations undertaken while the panel

was aboard USS Nassau.

"The strength of a MEU lies in its flexibility. It serves as seven acres of U.S. soil that you can put off the coast of any nation," said Col. Peter Petronzio, the 24th MEU's commanding officer. "It is able to fulfill a humanitarian and war time role through the Navy and Marine Corps team."

Another key point was the role the Marine Corps is taking in helping other nation's provide for their own security. "We now have a generation of Marines that have a better understanding based on their experiences in Al Anbar [province, Iraq] and that counter insurgency effort," said Col. David L. Close, the operations officer for II MEF.

Close added that the hard-learned lessons from Iraq are being delivered worldwide as advisory and training teams from II MEF work with other nation's militaries in an effort to provide them with the tools and knowledge to protect their own country from hostile elements. In recent years, II MEF has dispatched more than 100 advisor teams and nearly 1,500 advisors and trainers to countries in Africa, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Central and South America.

As the panel returned to Cherry Point for its departure from North Carolina, Hejlik paused to explain that the Marine Corps' ability to engage in conventional warfare will never leave, but there is a growing need for irregular warfare training to become a staple of the curriculum, and the Corps is rising to meet that challenge.

For more information on the II Marine Expeditionary Force, visit the unit's web site at www.iiemfpublic.usmc.mil.



Landing Craft Air Cushion (LCAC)-37 makes it's approach towards Nassau during a demonstration.
Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson